News

Focus Accused of Forgetting Details

Paulk reinstated as featured speaker after gay bar snafu

By Cara DeGette

The man who snapped the infamous photograph of Focus on the Family's poster boy for the "ex-gay" movement as he socialized at a gay bar in Washington is accusing the Colorado Springs ministry of willfully misleading the public.

This 1998 cover of Newsweek *shows ex-gay John Paulk with his ex-lesbian wife, Anne.*

Wayne Besen, a spokesman for the Washington-based Human Rights Campaign, came out swinging this week after Focus on the Family quietly reinstated John Paulk as a featured speaker in its upcoming "Love Won Out" seminar scheduled Feb. 3 in San Diego.

The daylong seminar is sponsored by Focus and designed to teach educators, parents, youth leaders, pastors and others that homosexuality is "preventable and treatable."

According to its literature, the seminar will tackle such topics as, "the clinical development of homosexuality, the gay agenda in public schools, homosexual recovery, how change occurs in youth, and the appropriate Christian response to the gay activist movement."

But in a Jan. 23 press release advertising the seminar, the ministry makes no mention of Paulk's lapse last year.

Rather, the ministry touts him for being married to an ex-lesbian, and appearing as an ex-gay leader in such national media as *Oprah*, *60 Minutes*, *Newsweek* and *USA Today*.

Besen, who photographed Paulk in the widely publicized gay bar incident last fall, accuses Focus of committing the sin of omission.

"They are not admitting that John Paulk was discredited," Besen said. "They are selling a defective product without giving the people who are attending the seminar the most important detail about his résumé," Besen said.

Focus on the Family officials did not return calls seeking comment. Criticism over the ministry's omission of Paulk's visit to the gay bar comes at the same time more controversy rocked the "ex-gay" world.

This week, the online wire service for gay men and women, Gay.com, reported that the director of a British affiliate of the reparative therapy ministry Exodus International announced he has concluded that reforming gays doesn't work.

The director of the Exodus affiliate, Jeremy Marks, announced he is taking a sabbatical for at least two years and plans to concentrate on helping Christian gays instead of trying to cure them, Gay.com reported on Monday. (In an e-mail to the *Independent*, Marks confirmed the accuracy of the story.) In the story, Marks was quoted as saying, "None of the people we've counseled have converted, no matter how much effort and prayer they've put into it."

When Paulk, the homosexuality and gender analyst at Focus on the Family, was spotted in a gay bar in Washington D.C. last Sept. 19. he initially claimed that he had stopped in the bar to use the bathroom, but later admitted he had known it was a gay bar and went there to relieve stress.

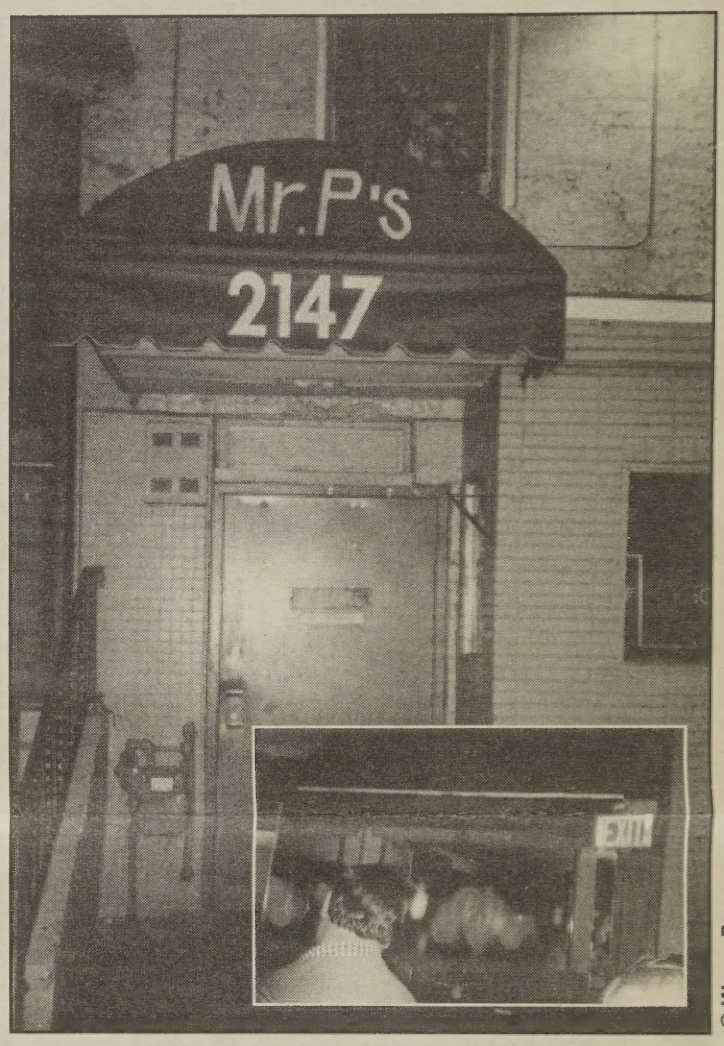
At the time, Paulk was also chairman of Exodus International and was subsequently removed from his post. Bob Davies, the North American director of Exodus International, called Paulk's "serious lapse of judgment" a blow to the ministry's credibility and, in October, Focus on the Family vice president Tom Minnery told *Christianity Today* that he felt Exodus' actions were appropriate.

"I am pleased that John will remain a member of their board as he continues the process of restoration," Minnery told the magazine.

Paulk was removed from the lineup of speakers that were scheduled to testify at Focus' "Love Won Out" seminar held in Colorado Springs shortly after the gay bar spotting, though Minnery told *Christianity Today* that he expected Paulk would eventually be reinstated to the seminar.

The Colorado Springs ministry believes that gays and lesbians can be "cured," though medical and psychological experts have discredited the idea that homosexuals can change and become heterosexual. Many gays and lesbians spend thousands of dollars, and many years trying to become straight, often with fruitless efforts, Besen and other gay activists warn.

"Focus, which bases its beliefs on moral values, is promoting him and profiting off his tapes and his books, and it's inherently dishonest to tell people, 'come and be like John,' but not tell them who John is," Besen said.



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John Paulk (inset) was photographed inside the popular Washington D.C. gay bar Mr. P's last September.

"It's inherently dishonest to tell people, 'come and be like John.'"

— Wayne Besen

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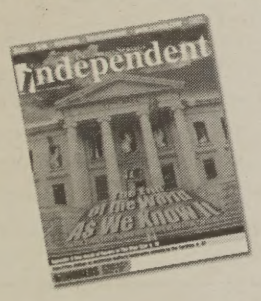

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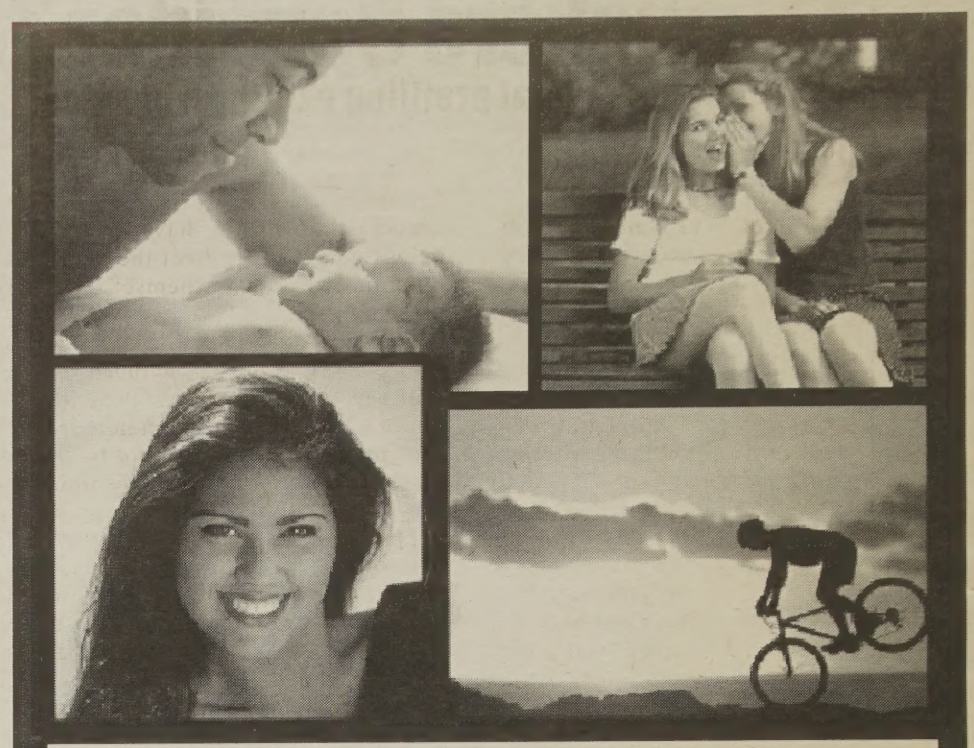

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